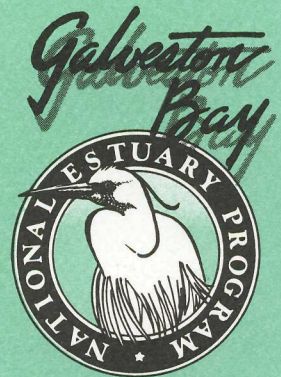


Proceedings
Galveston Bay Characterization Workshop
February 21-23, 1991



Galveston Bay
National Estuary Program

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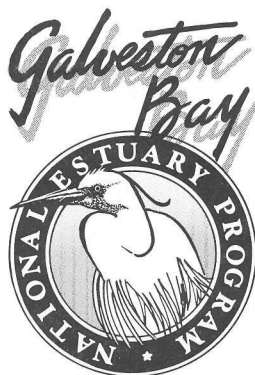
Proceedings

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Preface

The Galveston Bay National Estuary Program

By all measures, Galveston Bay ranks high among the estuaries recognized by Congress as Nationally Significant. The Bay's seafood productivity; its role as a major recreational resource; its multi-billion dollar influence on the economy (as third largest port in the nation, sixth largest in the world); its role as a repository for half the permitted waste water discharges in Texas; its declining wetlands; the contamination of its sediments, water, and marine life: all these have prompted a concern that the human pressures on the estuary are overpowering its natural resiliency.

The Galveston Bay National Estuary Program (GBNEP) was created in response to this concern for Galveston Bay. The emphasis of the GBNEP is to solve the Bay's problems by improving our governance of the Bay. In the past, the Bay has not been managed as a single ecosystem, resulting in diverse activities and little coordination among the numerous agencies involved. Without a coordinated effort among user groups, regulators, and the public, the value of Galveston Bay as a Texas and American resource is at risk.

The GBNEP was conceived as a cooperative effort by the State of Texas and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In organization, the GBNEP consists of a Management Conference of about one hundred individuals representing all segments of the Galveston Bay Community. The Management Conference is organized in six committees, under the authority of a Policy Committee, and is coordinated by a Director and Program Office staff under the auspices of the Texas Water Commission.

As a National Estuary Program, the GBNEP is authorized by the Water Quality Act of 1987 to draft a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) to address the recognized threats from pollution, development, and overuse of Galveston Bay. The drafting of a CCMP is a staged process preceded by identification and ranking of estuarine problems and information-gathering and scientific work to better define these problems. These proceedings are part of the scientific efforts to establish an objective information basis for effective estuary management.

Introduction

The fifty-six short papers composing this proceedings represent the concerted work of numerous scientists with a knowledge of, and concern for, Galveston Bay. These papers are the result of an invitation to the scientific community for contributions centered on estuarine problems already identified and agreed upon by consensus as a *Galveston Bay Priority Problems List* (see page 4). Reports on work in progress were encouraged, as well as completed projects.

These contributions have helped successfully accomplish four broad goals: first, to identify scientific work on Galveston Bay being conducted by institutions other than the GBNEP; second, to promote peer interaction among the principle investigators involved in this research; third, to improve our understanding of estuarine problems in need of management solutions; and finally, to encourage project coordination in an ecosystem context.

For the GBNEP, this workshop and proceedings constitute a step midway in the process toward drafting of the CCMP. Previous Scientific efforts have identified a critical need for comprehensive studies of Galveston Bay (*Galveston Bay: Issues, Resources, Status, and Management*, U. S. Department of Commerce, 1989). Future work will result in publication of a *Galveston Bay Environmental Characterization Report* in 1993 that will help establish a comprehensive factual basis for the CCMP.

In compiling these contributions and listening to the related workshop discussions, we have recognized several themes that will affect our future work. One is a realization of the abundance of good information on Galveston Bay (more than anyone thought existed). Another is the fragmented nature of this information and the lack of connectedness of the ongoing work, particularly for resource agencies charged with managing the estuary. Finally, a significant loss of historical data suggests a need for an ongoing, organized system to maintain Galveston Bay data and information.

As scientific efforts are consolidated during the remainder of the Bay characterization process, our greatest challenge will therefore be to insure the permanence of research findings, and make them systematically useful to resource managers. Thankfully, this challenge has attracted most of the best Texas coastal researchers, who have shown a continuing commitment to conservation based on the best science available.

On behalf of Galveston Bay National Estuary Program we extend our gratitude to each author involved in improving our understanding of this significant Texas resource. We particularly extend our thanks to the individuals who "volunteered" their services as Session Chairs in response to our hopeful suggestions; and to Carol Ward who tirelessly presided over the multitude of arrangements for this Workshop.

- Eds.